

Syria - Killing Journalists Enabled “Media Activist” Domination - Intended Effect?

By [Moon of Alabama](#)

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

As [pointed out](#) yesterday, a recent tweet series by [Club des Cordeliers](#) made some [interesting observation](#) about the [#StandWithAleppo](#) propaganda campaign:

The “Stand with Aleppo” campaign in the U.S. was started and is propelled by a Democratic party operative who is also CEO of a public relations company and “strategic affairs consultant” in Chicago, Becky Carroll.

The *Cordeliere* made some additional remarks on anti-Syria propaganda. These about the U.S. directed Information Warfare campaign from inside Syria. This leads me to the thoughts below about the U.S. waged Unconventional Warfare in Syria and how it may be responsible for the elimination of “neutral” journalists on the ground.

We start with *Club des Cordeliers* [remarks](#) on the video campaign coming out of Syria and currently especially out of east-Aleppo:

US State Dep’t has openly trained Syrian “activists” in social media propaganda techniques since 2012. U.S. Embassy Geneva, Aug 21, 2012 [U.S. Equipment, Training Reaching Syrian Opposition](#):

The State Department has \$25 million in nonlethal assistance that it can use for training purposes, and [State Department spokeswoman Victoria] Nuland said “a broad cross section of activists” inside Syria and in neighboring countries is benefiting from an “extremely active” U.S. training effort that is focused on Syrians who have not left their country. “We are doing training on free media, countering the government’s circumvention technology, legal and justice and accountability issues, and how to deal with the crimes that have been committed during this conflict, programs for student activists who are encouraging peaceful protest on the university campuses, [and] programs for women,” Nuland said.

She added that the State Department has been working for years with Syrians and others on ways to counter Internet censorship, as well as supporting Syrian human rights and justice programs.

US trained Syrian contra propagandists via seminars conducted in Istanbul. St.Louis Public Radio, Dec 3, 2012 [U.S. Steps Up Aid \(But No Arms\) To Syrian Exiles](#):

[T]he U.S. State Department is supporting Syria's political opposition, in projects that have been under wraps until recently. One program, a multimillion-dollar media project called Basma, or "fingerprint" in English, is run out of an office in Istanbul where Syrian activists write and produce reports for a Facebook page and the Basma website. A promotional video explains the goals of Basma: "to support a peaceful transition for a new Syrian nation that supports and guards the freedom of all of its citizens."

...
In another U.S.-funded program, kept quiet over security concerns, young activists, mostly those in the front lines in the early days of the revolt, are invited to Istanbul for workshops. They gather in hotels, from towns and villages inside Syria. They are now members of revolutionary councils — civilians trying to restore services and local government in places out of regime control.

Syrian "activists" given electronic equipment & technical instruction in State Dep't-sponsored Istanbul trainings. Wired, Oct 25, 2012 [Exclusive: U.S. Rushes to Stop Syria from Expanding Chemical Weapon Stockpile:](#)

U.S. intelligence agencies are believed to be helping with the training of opposition groups, while the Pentagon denies shipping arms to the rebels. In public, American aid has largely been limited to organizational advice (Washington is trying to set up a council of opposition leaders in Doha in the next few weeks, for instance) and technical assistance. Several hundred Syrian activists have traveled to Istanbul for training in secure communications, funded by the U.S. State Department. The rebel leaders received tips on how to leapfrog firewalls, encrypt their data, and use cellphones without getting caught, as Time magazine recently reported. Then they returned to Syria, many of them with new phones and satellite modems in hand.

To NATO military strategists, social media propaganda is element of "winning the online information war" in Syria. Small Wars Journal, Apr 26, 2016 [The Impact of Cyber Capabilities in the Syrian Civil War:](#)

The events of the Syrian Civil War have clearly demonstrated the power of cyber capabilities in warfare. [...] However, it would appear that all of the actors have used cyber capabilities for propaganda purposes. The use of social media, DDoS attacks, and the defacement of websites were all used to promote strategic narrative or to undermine and embarrass the enemy. Although all of these activities would fall under the category of information war, developments in social technology has increased the importance of winning the online information war. This is illustrated by the fact that most of the information that the public receives about the conflict is transmitted through social media.

Revealing chart outlining US Army Special Ops doctrine on use of electronic communication in unconventional warfare. FM 3-05.130 Unconventional Warfare, Sep 2008 [Table B-1 - Information operations integration into joint operations](#) (pdf)

Highly influential 1989 paper on Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) called for technology-driven psychological warfare. Marine Corp Gazette, Oct 1989 [The Changing Face of War – Into the 4th Generation](#) (pdf)

Psychological operations may become the dominant operational and strategic weapon in the form of media/information intervention. Logic bombs and computer viruses, including latent viruses, may be used to disrupt civilian as well as military operations. Fourth generation adversaries will be adept at manipulating the media to alter domestic and world opinion to the point where skillful use of psychological operations will sometimes preclude the commitment of combat forces. A major target will be the enemy population's support of its government and the war. Television news may become a more powerful operational weapon than armored divisions.

All this is to make clear that **there is nothing random or organic about online propaganda produced by Syrian “activists.”**

Bana hoax, Aleppo “farewell” videos, et al. should be seen as coordinated, strategic information warfare funded and organized by US actors.

Some additional thoughts on this.

A recent piece by *Patrick Cockburn* in the *Independent* points to the mass of propaganda about and out of Syria, mostly U.S. directed as shown above, and explains why we only see and hear this and nothing else: [There’s more propaganda than news coming out of Aleppo this week](#):

[T]he jihadis holding power in east Aleppo were able to **exclude Western journalists**, who would be abducted and very likely killed if they went there, and **replace them as news sources with highly partisan “local activists”** who cannot escape being under jihadi control.

...

The precedent set in Aleppo means that **participants in any future conflict will have an interest in deterring foreign journalists** who might report objectively. **By kidnapping and killing them, it is easy to create a vacuum of information that is in great demand and will, in future, be supplied by informants sympathetic to or at the mercy of the very same people (in this case the jihadi rulers of east Aleppo) who have kept out the foreign journalists.** Killing or abducting the latter turns out to have been a smart move by the jihadis because it enabled them to establish substantial control of news reaching the outside world.

We have to see the killing and kidnapping of journalists as a (secret) part of the arsenal of the Unconventional Warfare and the U.S. created propaganda storm out of Syria.

The same applies to humanitarian Non-Government Organizations. Neither the United Nations, nor the Red Cross or any other neutral NGO had staff in east-Aleppo. Only the MI-6 propaganda outlet SOHR in Coventry provides numbers allegedly sourced from Syria. Only (U.S. trained) “media activists” on the Takfiri side report or tweet from inside east-Aleppo. Only these get interviewed. Only the U.S./UK created and directed “White Helmets” and the French government sponsored Takfiri “Aleppo Media Channel” produce pictures and videos

from inside east-Aleppo. As this was the only available information source and sole available audio-visual material it was heavily used by news outlets around the world. It reflected solely the armed oppositions and its sponsors' views and warfare needs.

If one intends to give a maximum effect to the propaganda output of ones proxies in an Information Warfare operation, it makes great sense to eliminate all other potential sources of information from the wider warzone. Thus - the abduction and killing of neutral professional journalists is a conscious process that enables their replacement with ones own Information Warfare assets. I believe we have seen such a process in Syria.

A similar process was applied earlier when the U.S. invaded Iraq. News outlets which gave a different than the official U.S. view were targeted by U.S. military forces. The Al-Jazeera offices in Baghdad were [bombed](#) by the U.S. military. (The White House even [considered](#) bombing the Al-Jazeera head office in Doha, Qatar.) Wikileaks [published](#) a video which showed a U.S. helicopter killing Reuters staffers. Only journalists embedded with the U.S. military were protected against U.S. military action. Their reports were naturally heavily skewed towards the official U.S. propaganda view.

(On top of all of that we have to consider that even regular news outlets and journalists are often [vehicles of intelligence services](#) and as such far from neutral.)

The killing or abduction of journalists in a war zone allows their replacement with better controlled and more partisan assets. Just raising the (security) costs for real journalists has such an effect. A news outlet has to pay for professionally made news agency photos or videos. The U.S./UK propaganda operation "White Helmets" has produced hundreds of "gripping" and "emotional" [staged rescue operation pictures](#) and videos. It distributes those for free in "ready to be used" high quality. Many news outlets prefer these no-cost pictures even though their veracity is highly questionable.

Keeping journalists away from the battle zone by killing or abducting a few of them at the beginning of the conflict helped enormously to increase the effect of the later Information Warfare operation known as "White Helmets" and other similar organizations.

This brings me back to U.S. Embassy Geneva [report quoted above](#). In the very same speech in which U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland lauded the creation, training and outfitting of U.S proxy teams for propaganda creation and other purposes (aka "media activists") she also *lamented* the demise of real journalists in Syria:

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters August 21 that the United States has provided more than 900 sets of communications gear to groups and individuals inside Syria.

...

Nuland also offered condolences to the family of Japanese journalist Mika Yamamoto, who was killed August 20 while she was traveling with Syrian opposition forces in Aleppo, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Yamamoto, who worked for the Tokyo-based Japan Press, was caught in gunfire, the Foreign Ministry said.

Nuland also said the U.S. government had lost contact with two stringers reporting for the Alhurra television network who had reportedly been traveling with Yamamoto.

In an August 21 interview with the Voice of America, Reporters Without Borders spokeswoman Soazig Dollet said five foreign journalists have been killed since the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, and that Syria “is now the most dangerous place for war reporter[s] in the world.”

The lauding of U.S. proxy media efforts and the (fake) lamenting over the killing of real journalists by Victoria Nuland in one speech were totally unrelated to each other – unless they were not. It was totally unintended that the resulting lack of real journalists in Syria amplified the effect of the U.S. Information Operation by proxy. Or maybe it was not.

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